UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT TO INTERVENE IN WENATCHEE, WASHINGTON POWER PROJECT

The Department of the Interior has petitioned the Federal Power Commission for the right to intervene formally in hearings for a proposed private hydroelectric power development in the Wenatchee River Valley of central Washington. The Department presently is opposed to the project on grounds of adverse effects on fish, wildlife, and recreational resources.

Public Utility District No. 1 of Chelan County, Washington, has applied to the Federal Power Commission for a license to build the hydro-electric facility which would involve three dams on the Wenatchee River and its tributaries. Two huge tunnels are proposed to carry water from the lakes to powerhouses at a lower elevation. Most of the water would bypass large segments of streams that are prime spawning areas for three kinds of salmon and steelhead trout, and the reservoirs would flood out extensive existing spawning grounds, Interior officials said.

Studies by Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service have shown that the Wenatchee River's spawning and rearing habitat has supported runs of thousands of sockeye and chinook salmon and steelhead annually. Coho salmon, formerly in great abundance, have recently been reintroduced in the Wenatchee River system. The potential runs of this fish have not been determined but the natural habitat is believed sufficient for a greatly increased population.

The site for the proposed project is also home to one of the most important mule deer herds in Washington. It is extensively used by deer during the summer and has particular value as a fawning area. During the fall, the proposed project lands and surrounding areas sustain unusually heavy hunting pressure, particularly by hunters from the Puget Sound area.

When Grand Coulee Dam was constructed on the upper Columbia River, the Wenatchee River and three other Washington streams were chosen to replace natural spawning areas that were cut off by Grand Coulee Dam. Congress, in authorizing construction of Grand Coulee, also included funds for relocating the fish runs and construction of three National Fish Hatcheries to supplement natural spawning. The Interior Department contends that the intent of Congress was preservation of the four rivers to maintain the fish resources, and that this intent would be nullified by the proposed project if licensed by the Federal Power Commission.